El Cerrito’s 25th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration

The 25th annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration was held in El Cerrito on January 20. The event was sponsored by the City of El Cerrito Human Relations Commission, St. Peter Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the El Cerrito Branch NAACP, and the West Contra Costa County Unified School District.

Long-time event coordinator Patricia Durham estimated approximately 1,000 people attended the parade and rally. The parade was led by the El Cerrito High School marching band, and traveled from the D.M.V. to the high school. The rally program in the school’s Performing Arts Theater featured speaker Michael E. Parker. The event also included performances by:

- Bay Area Line Dancers
- Oakland Black Cowboy Association
- Students from Ms. Halpern’s 2nd grade class at Harding Elementary School
- El Cerrito High School Jazz Band
- Portola Middle School Jazz Band
- El Cerrito High School Dance Production
- Montessori Family School, El Cerrito
- East Bay Masonic Lodge
- Japanese American Citizen League
- Singer Tonnie Harvey
- Lee Malone
- Unitarian Church of Berkeley
- Christian Lee, Richmond College Prep. School
- Caden Cotton-Blake, Madera Elementary School
- Tibetan Association of Northern California

“El Cerrito’s Martin Luther King Celebration brought our community together on this national holiday. Let’s keep the dream of Martin Luther King Jr. alive by continuing to hold this very special El Cerrito Celebration for years to come, and by giving back to our community by volunteering,” said Human Relations Commission Chair, Gabe Quinto.

More photos from the event are online at www.el-cerrito.org/mlk.
## Upcoming Events!

**Through April 10**

**Free Income Tax Preparation**

AARP Tax Aide Service (e-file only) is available for people of limited to moderate income in Contra Costa County. Appointments available 8:45 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays through April 10. Call 559-7677 to make an appointment.

**When:** By appointment only  
**Where:** Open House Senior Center  
6500 Stockton Avenue

**Wednesday, February 26**

**Recycling Center Conduct and Salvage Rules**

Attend a community meeting to review the effectiveness of the Rules of Conduct established last year, and to talk about possible changes. Topics could include additional limits on visitation hours, Exchange Zone/Salvage activities on weekends, and other efforts to make the facility more welcoming to all users. If you have comments to share but cannot attend, please contact Garth Schultz at 559-7684 or gschultz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

**When:** 3–4 p.m.  
**Where:** Recycling + Environmental Resource Center  
7501 Schmidt Lane

**Thursday, February 27**

**Smoke Protection Community Workshop**

Share your thoughts on how best to protect the public from exposure to secondhand smoke in El Cerrito. For more information, call 215-4302 or go online and take a survey at: www.el-cerrito.org/smoking.

**When:** 6:30–8 p.m.  
**Where:** City Hall, 10890 San Pablo Ave

**March 1–7**

**California Arbor Week**

Visit the City’s website or call 215-4350 to get involved in local Arbor Day events. Business owners can also complete a survey about trees at www.el-cerrito.org/treesurvey.

**March 10–16**

**Compost Giveaway**

Get your garden ready! All week long, El Cerrito residents can get up to 5 cubic feet (33 gallons) of compost made from yard waste and food scraps. (Proof of residency required.)

**When:** 9 a.m.–4 p.m.  
**Where:** Recycling + Environmental Resource Center  
7501 Schmidt Lane

**March 13–31**

**Community Input on Budget Priorities**

Get involved in the City’s budget process! Attend a neighborhood meeting, or participate online at www.el-cerrito.org/budgetpriorities. For more information, see the article on page 7.

**When:**  
**Thursday, March 13, 6:30 pm**  
**Where:** Harding School MPR  
7230 Fairmount Ave

**When:**  
**Saturday, March 15, 10:30 am**  
**Where:** Arlington Clubhouse  
1120 Arlington Blvd

**When:**  
**Tuesday, March 25, 7 p.m.**  
**Where:** Open House Senior Center  
6500 Stockton Ave

**When:**  
**Monday, March 31, 6:30 pm**  
**Where:** Canyon Trail Clubhouse  
6757 Gatto Ave

**March 5**

**Disaster Preparedness**

Attend a presentation on Contra Costa County’s Community Warning System and meet the CERT Area Coordinator for your neighborhood. For more details, call the Fire Department at 215-4450.

**When:** 7–9 p.m.  
**Where:** Community Center  
7007 Moeser Lane

**Saturday, March 29**

**Earth Hour**

Switch off non-essential lights for one hour to show your support for protecting the planet. For details on additional Earth Hour related events, contact Maria Sanders at msanders@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

**When:** 8:30–9:30 p.m.  
**Where:** Your home or business

**Saturday, April 12**

**Friends of the El Cerrito Library Spring Book Sale**

Sale features a large selection of children’s books, fiction & nonfiction, paperbacks & videos, and books on crafts, home repair, gardening and cooking—all for just 50¢ each! Book sales raise funds to purchase new books and benefit activities of the Library, particularly children’s programs. For details, visit the website at http://friendselcerritolibrary.wordpress.com.

**When:** 10 a.m.–4 p.m.  
**Where:** El Cerrito Library  
6510 Stockton Ave
**Sunday, April 13**

**CHAMBER ORCHESTRA CONCERT**

The Arts & Culture Commission invites you to attend a free concert by the Lucas Valley Chamber Orchestra. Donations at the door will benefit the David Hunter Memorial Scholarship Fund, making Recreation Department classes and programs available to youth and seniors. Everyone is welcome.

**When:** 3 p.m.
**Where:** El Cerrito Community Center
7007 Moeser Lane

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**Saturday, April 26**

**EARTH DAY**

Join your friends and neighbors at an Earth Day work party to beautify El Cerrito. Work parties are held at various locations around town, followed by a free lunch at the Community Center. Contact us if you have an idea for a project or would like to get involved as a group leader. For more information, visit [www.el-cerrito.org/earthday](http://www.el-cerrito.org/earthday) or call 215-4350.

**When:** Work parties, 9 a.m.–noon
**Lunch, noon–1:30 p.m.**
**Where:** Work parties at various locations
Lunch at the El Cerrito Community Center
7007 Moeser Lane

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**Monday, April 28**

**DYNAMO GOLF SCRAMBLE**

Support the Recreation Department’s major fundraiser for the David Hunter Memorial Scholarship Fund and the Open House Senior Center. Registration includes an 18 Hole game of golf, cart, lunch, and awards. For more details go to [www.el-cerrito.org/recreation](http://www.el-cerrito.org/recreation) or call 559-7000.

**When:** 8 a.m. check-In
9 a.m. shotgun
**Where:** Mira Vista Golf and Country Club

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**Saturday, May 3**

**SPRING CITYWIDE GARAGE SALE**

You are sure to find good bargains when you shop the Spring Garage Sale. Last year, there were over 65 locations! A list of locations will be available online at [www.el-cerrito.org](http://www.el-cerrito.org), and in self-serve literature stands at the Community Center and the Recycling Center, one week before the sale.

**When:** 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
**Where:** Various locations

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**Sunday, May 4**

**BRINGING BACK THE NATIVES GARDEN TOUR**

Want to learn more about how to make your garden more drought tolerant by using native plants? Attend free, self-guided tours of 50 native gardens in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, sponsored by the Clean Water Program. See [www.bringingbackthenatives.com](http://www.bringingbackthenatives.com) for more details and to pre-register.

**When:** 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
**Where:** Various locations

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**Thursday May 8**

**BIKE TO WORK DAY**

On your way to work or school, stop at the City’s “Energizer Station” for free goodies, bicycling information, and to talk to City staff about biking and walking in El Cerrito.

**When:** 7–9 a.m.
**Where:** Ohlone Greenway “Wave”
Bike Lockers behind the El Cerrito Plaza BART Station

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**Saturday, May 31**

**OHLONE GREENWAY FEST**

After necessary closures due to BART seismic safety construction, the Greenway is now open! Save the date to celebrate the improvements to the Ohlone Greenway, the City’s 3.7 mile multi-use trail. Look for details soon at [www.el-cerrito.org/greenwayfest](http://www.el-cerrito.org/greenwayfest) or call 215-4318.

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**Are Home Improvements on Your Mind?**

Do you have questions? Do you have questions? The staff of the Community Development Department has answers to many common questions:

- **Just how old is my roof?**
- **What are the three most effective things I can do to cut energy costs?**
- **Can I build a hot tub in my yard?**
- **When should I replace my deck?**

Development Services Manager, Margaret Kavanaugh-Lynch encourages residents to contact the Community Development Department. “We can sometimes provide information on the history of your house, and before you start the project, we can tell you if the work will require a permit or not, and if you’ll need simple or detailed plans,” she explained.

For some small construction projects, it is possible for a property owner to prepare their own plans. Other, more complex projects require the hiring of a designer, architect, or engineer. Successful construction projects start with a solid idea of what you want to do and are later translated into a complete set of plans.

The Community Development Department strives to help you complete your projects in a safe and legal way. Staff can assist you in researching your home’s permit history (we may even have plans), provide information regarding building setbacks and height limits, and give you tips regarding the current State Building Code.

“While we cannot design a project for you, we are glad to assist you with your homework. For a preliminary meeting, it is most helpful to bring some photos of the existing conditions of the part of the home you are thinking of working on, as well as a list of your questions,” suggests Kavanaugh-Lynch.

To set up a preliminary meeting or just to ask a few questions, please call 215-4330.

For simple tips that may help you as you start on your project, you can also visit [www.el-cerrito.org/building](http://www.el-cerrito.org/building).
New Regulations Fight Plastic Bag and EPS Foam Food Ware Pollution

As of January 1, 2014, retail establishments in El Cerrito (including grocery and department stores, and other retail establishments) are prohibited from distributing single-use “carry out” plastic bags. (Restaurants and nonprofit charitable reusers are exempt.) Additionally, any paper carry-out bags provided to customers must contain at least 40% post-consumer recycled content and the retailer must charge at least five cents per bag. Small plastic or paper bags (without handles), typically placed inside a carryout bag (such as those found in the fresh produce or meat department at a grocery store), are still allowed. Similar regulations are in place in the cities of Richmond and San Pablo, and in all of Alameda County.

The City encourages shoppers to take their own re-usable bags when they go shopping.

Also starting this year, food service businesses are prohibited from using expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam food ware (often referred to by the brand name “Styrofoam”) in El Cerrito. The businesses must now use compostable, recyclable, or reusable food ware. These regulations also apply to groups renting City facilities, such as the Community Center or Senior Center.

Both single-use bags and foam food ware contribute to pollution on streets, and in gutters, storm drains, and creeks. Approximately one million of these plastic retail bags end up in the bay each year, according to the State’s Integrated Waste Management Board. In our creeks, the bay, and the ocean, plastic bags are a deadly pollutant, smothering wetlands and entangling, suffocating, and poisoning wildlife. Up to 90% of the floating debris is plastic, and is not biodegradable.

Even when properly disposed of, plastic bags and EPS Foam are challenging to remove from the environment. Because they are so light, wind easily blows them out of waste containers, autos, and solid waste handling operations.

The City has provided local businesses with outreach materials for customers. For businesses interested in learning more about the new regulations, there will be a Breakfast Informational Session on Thursday, March 20. See page 2 for details.

If you have questions about the bag or foam food ware regulations, please visit www.el-cerrito.org/bagsandfoam or contact the Operations + Environmental Services Division at 215-4350 or green@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

Wall of Fame

The El Cerrito Wall of Fame, located in the El Cerrito City Hall, recognizes residents who have made significant contributions to the community, over an extended period of time, through their work on special projects. The first honoree was Sundar Shadi in 1990. There are currently 17 honorees.

To nominate an El Cerrito resident to the Wall of Fame, submit an application to the City Clerk by March 15th. The application and guidelines for nomination and selection are available from the City Clerk, 215-4305.

Donald West

In 1993, Don West was inducted into the El Cerrito Wall of Fame for his service to the community, including his support of equality and civil rights. Mr. West served on the El Cerrito City Council from 1966–70, and was Mayor from 1968–69. A founding member of the City’s Human Relations Commission, he served on the Commission from 1989–93. He was a member of the Stege Sanitary District Board 1977–98, and also sat on the board of the Greater Richmond Interfaith Program (GRIP). He was active in his church, the Mira Vista United Church of Christ, and in Richmond’s West County Adult Day Care program.

Mr. West was a chemical engineer at Standard Oil (now Chevron) for 41 years and retired in 1984. He passed away in 2010 at the age of 88.
Maintaining Your Home’s Sewer Lateral Line

Do you know that tree roots growing inside a sewer lateral can clog or damage pipes and result in costly repairs? The “lateral” is the portion of the sewer between a building and the main sewer in the street, and is sometimes called a “side sewer.” In El Cerrito, property owners are responsible for maintaining their entire sewer laterals, up to and including the connections to the sewer main.

It is not surprising that many homes in El Cerrito today have sewer laterals with leaking joints. Most homes built between 1940 and 1970 have sewer laterals made of clay with a joint sealant material that starts to break down after 25 to 30 years. Modern sewer pipes are generally made of high strength plastic called HDPE.

Making a leaky problem worse, tree roots grow toward the tiny cracks in the sewer laterals, seeking the nutrients and moisture in the pipes. If the roots grow undetected in the lateral, a root mass can form and become matted with grease, tissue paper and other debris, blocking the flow of sewage from the lateral to the main line. Eventually, the roots will break the pipe walls and cause the lateral to collapse, requiring repair or replacement.

Warning Signs
Early signs of a slowing sewer lateral include gurgling noises from the toilet bowl or a back up in the shower when the clothes washer is in the spin cycle. A complete blockage may occur if no remedial action is taken to remove the problem.

Stege Sanitary District encourages all homeowners experiencing sewer trouble to contact the district. Stege offers a free service call to determine if the cause of the issue is within the main or the lateral. All private sewer issues must be handled by a plumbing contractor, but the district should be contacted after the work is performed if there is any chance that roots or debris will drain into the sewer main.

A District permit and payment of fees are required for any sewer lateral related construction work. In addition, a separate Encroachment Permit is required by the City of El Cerrito if the project includes work being performed within the public right-of-way.

Failure Prevention
Homeowners should inspect their sewer laterals on a regular basis to avoid costly major repairs. For example, you can hire a plumber to perform a video inspection of your lateral to reveal debris blockage, root intrusion, low spots, cracked or deteriorating piping, and cracked, separated, or leaking pipe joints.

When root intrusion becomes a problem, qualified plumbing contractors offer various options for repair or replacement. Visit the Stege Sanitary District website at http://www.stegesan.org/faq/ general-guidelines for guidelines. The website also has a list of registered plumbing contractors.

If you have any questions about your sewer lateral, please call Stege Sanitary District at 524-4667.

Smoke Detectors Save Lives!

Most Fatal Home fires and carbon monoxide (CO) accidents occur at night, while people are asleep. Poisonous gases and smoke from a fire can numb the senses in a very short time, putting people into a deeper sleep. Every home needs devices that can wake people up in time to escape from fire or the build-up of carbon monoxide. Smoke and CO detectors really do save lives!

Smoke detectors are designed to alert you to the fact that there is a fire in the house. You should have a smoke detector in each bedroom and on each story of your house (including the basement or attic). CO alarms detect carbon monoxide, an invisible, odorless, colorless gas. Sources of CO include heating and cooking equipment that burn fuel, and vehicles or generators running in an attached garage. CO detectors should be installed outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home and in other locations where required by applicable laws, codes or standards.

It’s extremely important to test and clean all detectors and change the batteries regularly. An easy way to remember to replace the batteries is to do so when you adjust your clocks for daylight saving time (spring and fall). The detectors themselves should be replaced approximately every ten years. Always be sure to follow the manufacturer’s recommendations for installation, testing, maintenance and disposal of the detectors.

In an effort to insure that everyone has working smoke detectors in their homes, the El Cerrito Fire Department has a smoke detector program that supplies and installs smoke detectors for senior or disabled persons upon request. For more information, call 215-4450.

For additional information about detectors, and other tips to keep your home and family safe from fire, go online to www.el-cerrito.org/fire/detectors. Landlords or apartment managers with questions about laws and codes related to smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are also encouraged to contact the Fire Prevention Officer at 215-4457.
City Considers Exchange Zone Rules at Recycling Center

In early 2013, the City established official Rules of Conduct and Salvage for the new Recycling + Environmental Resource Center in order to make the facility safer and more welcoming for all users. These rules were developed after receiving input from the community and other stakeholders and currently include:

- Supervise children and leave pets at home
- Visits limited to 2 hours per person per day
- Parking in the Center limited to 30 minutes
- Do not take more than 1 file box of items per day from the Exchange Zone
- Do not take items from bins or other customers
- Do not get in, on, or move equipment
- Certain salvage activities allowed by permit only

The Exchange Zone is located in the covered structure at the entrance to the Center and is a free, community-run materials exchange for reusable and gently-used items including books, magazines, music, art supplies, and other re-usable items.

Staff is proposing changes, such as additional limits on visitation hours, and Exchange Zone/salvage activities during weekends when the Center is at its busiest. There will be a meeting on February 26 to hear ideas and feedback from residents. (See page 2 for meeting details.)

Contact Garth Schultz at 559-7684 or gschultz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us if you have comments or questions.

Expanding the Hillside Natural Area

The City-owned Hillside Natural Area (HNA) is approximately 100 acres of open space with more than 100 species of native plants, oak woodland and riparian environments, as well as a number of trails used for recreation and emergency access.

Residents informed the City that an undeveloped parcel of land next to the Hillside Natural Area would go on sale in mid-2013. The approximately 8 acre property is located just below Madera Elementary School, and presented a unique opportunity to connect the north and south portions of the Hillside Natural Area.

In July, the City Council entered into a partnership with the Trust for Public Land, a nationwide nonprofit land conservation organization, to purchase the property and hold it until December 17, 2014, to allow time for the City to seek public grants and interested residents to conduct a private fundraising campaign. The land will be integrated into the Hillside Natural Area for conservation and recreation purposes.

Purchase of the Madera property by the City fulfills one of the goals stated in the City’s 2007 Circulation Plan for Bicyclists and Pedestrians: “to improve access, connectivity and promote walking in hillside neighborhoods and across the City” by connecting the north and south portions of the Hillside Natural Area.

After the Council’s July action, a group of local volunteers and organizations, including members of the El Cerrito Trail Trekkers, the El Cerrito High School Mountain Bike Club, Friends of Five Creeks, and others, formed the El Cerrito Open Space Campaign to lead the private fundraising effort. The Trust for Public Land and the City, working together, have submitted two grant requests and will continue to submit grants as opportunities arise.

On Saturday, May 17, please attend the Campaign’s Hillside Festival to learn about the area’s natural wonders and enjoy the Hillside through a variety of activities.

For more information about the Hillside Festival, the El Cerrito Open Space Campaign, or to make an online donation, go to www.el-cerrito.org/hnaproperty. You can also visit the El Cerrito Trail Trekkers at http://ectrailtrekkers.org or call Campaign Chair Gary Hill at 681-9096. For more information about the overall effort, call the Community Development Department at 215-4339.
Prepare Your Pets for Emergencies

If you are like millions of animal owners, your pet is an important member of your household, so don’t forget to include your pet in your emergency plans. The likelihood that your pet will survive an emergency depends largely on the planning that you do today.

There are several things you can do to prepare you and your pet for an emergency. These include assembling an animal emergency supply kit and developing a pet care buddy system. Remember that what’s best for you is typically what’s best for your animals. But some plans will differ, depending on whether you can stay in your home during the emergency or have to evacuate to a safer location.

- **If you must evacuate**, take your animals with you, if possible. Animals may not be allowed inside public shelters so plan shelter alternatives that work for both you and your pets.
- **If you stay put**, stay safe. If there are threats outside, bring animals indoors and keep them under your direct control. Make sure all animals are wearing collars and tags. Keep dogs on leashes and cats in carriers.
- **Make a back-up emergency plan** in case you can’t care for your animals yourself. Develop a buddy system with neighbors, friends, or relatives to make sure that someone is available to care for or evacuate your animals if you cannot do it.

Planning ahead can make a big difference when disaster strikes.

Register Your Alarm System Online

**ALARMS HAVE LONG** been a means of preventing burglaries and other break-ins at homes and businesses. When the police are notified that an alarm has gone off, one or more police officers go to the home or business to assess the situation. A dispatcher also tries to contact the property owner to give them the option of going to the scene.

However, time spent trying to locate the property owner or responding to repeat false alarms (alarms in the absence of criminal activity) can divert police department resources from other serious needs. The City requires that all users of security alarm systems register their systems to enable the Police Department to more quickly contact property owners and to address false alarm problems. Recently, the Police Department contracted with CitySupport, LLC and now offers two easy and convenient registration methods for home owners and businesses to register their alarm systems.

Alarm system users may register by mail or online at [www.el-cerrito.org/alarms](http://www.el-cerrito.org/alarms) or [elcerritoca.citysupport.org](http://elcerritoca.citysupport.org). For more information or help with registration, call CitySupport at 888-865-9770.

“We are asking all alarm users to assist us in our effort to reduce the number of false alarms. Registration is an important part of this endeavor so we ask you to register your alarm system today and also remember to update any information as it changes,” said Samantha Wendling, Police Department Administrative Analyst. Home and business owners have been required to register their alarm systems since 2010.

**City Faces Tough Challenges Ahead**

The City of El Cerrito is facing tough fiscal challenges again this year. Unlike many other cities, during the recent economic recession and despite declining revenues and the dissolution of the City’s Redevelopment Agency by the State, the City managed to maintain its high level of service during these tough years. However, preliminary projections suggest it will be difficult for the City to maintain a balanced budget in the coming fiscal year without reducing programs and services, and/or developing new revenues.

Despite the financial challenges, the City is still committed to providing exemplary service to the public and to fulfilling the goals identified in the Strategic Plan (adopted in 2013). Staff is currently looking at how best to bring in additional revenues and reduce expenses, and is developing a plan to return the City’s reserves to at least 10% of budgeted annual expenditures in the near future.

To best prioritize our resources, we want to hear from community members like you! Please plan to attend a community meeting, or share your thoughts online. You can help the City determine the best way to allocate resources to the programs and services prioritized in the recently adopted City Strategic Plan.

Starting in early March, there will be a survey about the budget available at [www.el-cerrito.org/budgetpriorities](http://www.el-cerrito.org/budgetpriorities). Staff is also hosting a series of meetings (for addresses, see page 2):

- **Thursday, March 13,** 6:30 pm
  Harding School
- **Saturday, March 15,** 10:30 am
  Arlington Clubhouse
- **Tuesday, March 25,** 7 p.m.
  Open House Senior Center
- **Monday, March 31,** 6:30 pm
  Canyon Trail Clubhouse

Please check the website or contact Suzanne Farla, Community Outreach Specialist at siarla@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 215-4318 for more details.
The City of El Cerrito serves, leads and supports our diverse community by providing exemplary and innovative services, public places and infrastructure, ensuring public safety and creating an economically and environmentally sustainable future.

**“CERT” Saves Lives**

Over the past 21 years, the El Cerrito Fire Department has trained over 2,500 residents in community emergency response training. CERT teaches residents disaster preparedness techniques and basic disaster response skills.

The new Area Coordination Program designated 11 geographic areas in El Cerrito and 6 in Kensington to serve as a way for CERT graduates to connect with each other and to engage in neighborhood-based preparedness planning. Each CERT Area is led by an Area Coordinator who is a trained community member. Coordinators share an interest in preparing for disaster before it strikes, sharing their skills and expertise, and connecting with their neighbors.

To learn more about CERT, see a list of upcoming trainings and events, and find out how to contact your Area Coordinator, go online to [http://www.elcerrito.org/fire/cert](http://www.elcerrito.org/fire/cert). You can also call CERT Program Director, Battalion Chief Dave Gibson, at 215-4450.

Meet your CERT Area Coordinators and hear a public presentation on the Contra Costa County Community Warning System on March 5 at 7 p.m. See page 2 for details.